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1 Twenty years after his thesis on Winye chiefs and power in central Burkina Faso, J.-P. Jacob directs our attention to Winye land tenure and arrives at generalizations valid for other societies about the role of so-called *"chefs de terre"*[1] (Winye *inu*).

2 The Winye or Wunye are speakers of Ko, part of the Gur or Voltaic languages. Their territory lies between Mouhoun and Bale rivers near Boromo, mid-way between Bobo and Ouagadougou. Bordered in the East and North by Nouna, in the West by Marka, and in the South by immigrant Mossi *(yarse),* Winye lineages of various origins with slightly different cultural traditions settled here. A Jula trade route from the Middle Niger to the urban centers on the Black Volta passed here, and some Jula found a pretext for *jihad* against the animists *("kufr")* by claims of their caravans being robbed when the earth priests claimed customary dues for their hospitality. The son and disciple of Sidi Muhammad Karantao (a Bozo from Jenné), following his return from Mecca, gathered Marka, Mossi and Dagara Muslims and attacked Boromo, drove away most Winye, and settled his followers.

3 This occupation created demographic pressure in the south, while normal many empty tracts of land remained in the north. Eventually many Marka Muslims rejected Mahmud Karantao's *jihad* since they had previously lived peacefully with their neigbours, and joined the Bobo/Winye resistance reducing Karantao to Wahabu and Boromo. Only in the 20th century did the refugee lineages return to Boromo—and tried to install themselves on the fringes of the occupied territory by reviving ancient earth shrines, creating private plots, planting of economic trees, and refusing to return borrowed land

or lease land to non-kin. Being demographically weak, however, they did not succeed to evict the *mossi-yarse* occupants.

4 After this historical overview Jacob describes the conflicts between communities in chapter 2, the production and land tenure systems (chapter 3), tenure dynamics under different conditions—ample *vs.* limited land reserves—(chapter 4), and Boromo as a special case of extreme land pressure (chapter 5). After discussing inter-village property resources such as the flood plain for fishing (chapter 6), he elaborates generalizations about social organization and strategies of land access.

5 When the first people settled in virgin forest, the production factor "land" was in ample supply relative to the factor "labour". Land clearing, subsistence farming, and creating a viable community required sufficient people. Through collective actions *e.g.* communal hunting and fishing, common fields, festivals, rituals etc. the founders also constructed a social community with other villages in order to ensure survival and maximize results from available labour. Therefore strangers were welcomed as settlers and citizens, especially when they had special skills, knowledge or goods. The original settlers defined flexible property rights for themselves and affiliated citizens.

6 Since environmental forces were believed to control the lives of the communities *e.g.* droughts, floods, fires, epidemics or diseases, the founders also had to contend with the super-natural and installed earth shrines in order to neutralise these dangerous forces and ward off malevolent spirits, and ask them for success in human activities. Through sacrifices at the shrine the founding lineage gained access to the natural resources and eventually political control, and could provide fertility or abundance and prevent pollution of live-giving resources. Earth priests were the link not only to the group's mythical ancestor, preparing the resources ritually for fruitful exploitation, but also with the wider community through alliances with other earth chiefs and their spirits.

7 As several lineages frequently migrated together and became founding lineages in the new location, setting up their shrines and earth priests, the earth priesthood was often ceded by an older group to a younger group which became then responsible for the sacrifices. The first lineage remained "land owner" and the shrines established not only control over the territorial resources, but also social control over the other groups. The solidarity pact among these groups was maintained by councils of elders, meetings and common sacrifices.

8 With neighbouring villages—because they share common property resources such as hunting or fishing territories and organize annual collective hunts etc.—a larger community exists *(communauté d'appartenance);* (such former collective hunts which later became slave raids have resulted in the Mossi term *gurunsi*` = "prey" in Moore). Symbolically, all earth shrines of those villages are linked, as their lineage ancestors were kin or allies in the past; thus the various spirits inhabiting the territory form a symbolic alliance. The senior earth spirit *(sin ñubo)* of the first settlement watches over the earth spirits of later villages, and the earth priest of the founding village/lineage performs a rite of passage from simple earth priest to superior priest of the alliance, provided he has the means. One year after his installation, the earth priest makes a sacrifice to the superior forest spirit *(nyimbi),* whose shrine is superior to all other village cults such as water, air, fire or earth spirits. While the "forest" is always considered dangerous and requires sacrifices and remains under *nymbi's* control, the village with its fields *(champs de case)* is under the earth shrine *(sinbom)* which does not.

9 Later lineages wanting to install a shrine must establish alliances with the founding village. The allied villages form a network with regard to their land and mark no borders. Founding lineages claiming to have been noble in their communities of origin have as proof a powerful fetish, a mask or hunting cult. Their earth priest might renew the original alliance with the earth spirits through a sacrifice of a bull, to which he invites all the other earth chiefs from neighbouring villages. The earth priest of the guardian village receives a foreleg from such a newly enthroned earth priest *(inu = chef de terre intronisé).*

10 In general there are 3 statuses of land:

– the *forba,* which may be called bush fallow, is managed by the elders for collective fields *(homi ñamba)* of the group and for future generations; individual users need to sacrifice to the earth shrine at the beginning and end of season;

– the *katogo,* or family fields around the village, where owners of plots have to accept decisions by the earth priest and elders in the name of the earth shrine;

– finally, certain resources like lakes, hunting and grazing are communally owned and collectively exploited and proceeds distributed to all families and participants.

11 This property rights structure guarantees not only subsistence and livelihoods to individuals and families but also survival through a) redistribution of labor or products *e.g.* gifts to elders and old people after harvest, b) integration of foreigners to boost the work force, and c) land reserves for future generations. Land remains in the "public domain" without being divided and subdivided. Lineage elders and earth priests evoke the superior rights and interest of community and future generations, and consider individual rights subordinate. Today in many areas the balance between "labor" and "land" has shifted toward the former and new settlement is restricted, in particular in sub-urban areas where rural communities are swallowed by urban expansion. While land has private status—in order to allow individuals and families to subsist—it also has public status in order to guarantee "reproduction" of the group and availability for future generations. Ritual guarantees the possession of public land. In Winye areas of high and lower demographic pressur different strategies to solve the problem of land scarcity are practised. Communities with more land keep "strategic reserves" inside the *(forba)* under earth spirit's protection, while the communities around Boromo place restrictions on land leases and prohibit the alienation of land in a show of group solidarity. Where certain Winye lineages have to borrow *forba* land from other groups, the status of the land is only public, but land is so abundant in the South that virtually free access is possible.

12 Another comparison with the Mossi plateau and the Bobo *(bwaba)* of the Vallée du Kou shows that the Mossi seem to have suppressed individual inheritance and return fields to the lineage pool *(peende)* at the death of the holder, which is managed by elders *(kasma).* Among the Bobo the creation of irrigated perimeters—like the Office du Niger—has created land shortages for local inhabitants due to high influx of migrants.

13 Among the Winye the association of the *inu* (earth priest) with the *genius loci* and ancestral spirits creates a "Winye identity" which makes Winye land inalienable and guarantees access. Jacob claims that the Winye and many other Burkinabe societies distinguish between two juridical systems for the exploitation of natural resources; in fact only one system with different tenure statuses is operating, namely full individual ownership rights and partial rights which resemble shareholder status. The decline of

communal land and family fields *(foro-ba)* in favour of individuals fields have been described by J. Gallais for Mali, and a growing economic literature on the efficiency of share-tenure arrangements explains the "residual stubbornness by the elders" to refuse land sales.

14 The socio-political context of his study were government "reforms" to allow all citizens access to land, and the persistent refusal of local peoples to sell land. The earth priests who are descendants of the village founders retain a controlling role in access to land.

15 When approaching the question how in such a fixed system structural and systemic change become possible, Jacob points out three sources of change: *Generational change*— each new generation has to survive on its own and therefore reject constraints imposed by older generations, while claiming to be free to impose its own constraints on future generations. However, in rural agricultural societies like the Winye elders will let conditions for future generations not deteriorate and guarantee at least access to land by restricting its sale. The youth recognize this by gifts to the elders *e.g.* first harvest, for their previous efforts to make land productive, for example by clearing and improvement.

16 *Change through new earth priests.* Some have modified traditional funeral ceremonies abolishing costly forms of solidarity, while others have lifted sexual prohibitions between noble and casted lineages. Yet only superior earth priests *(inu)* may modify customary law and thereby become legislators, and even they may not modify land rights against the will of their community.

17 Finally, *changes from outside,* like the *jihad* of 1850, the Marka war of 1915, the colonial conquest, or the post-colonial political regimes. Each dominant group and new leadership seems to re-invent society, and neglect previous contributions, thus creating "layers of civilization". For example in neighboring Koudougou earth priests have changed for times, each initiating a new period. Since local institutions were mal-adapted they became victims of new actors and lost their authority. Presently, state authority questions the autonomy of local groups in the allocation of resources, arguing that land must be allocated to productive individuals instead of lying idle, but among Winye even Sankara's revolution or Agrarian Reform have had little impact and neither administration nor migrants pressed their claims as vigorously as in the Vallee du Kou. Nevertheless, the incapacity of the old earth priests to resist outside changes has divided lineages, and made minor lineages prominent *e.g.* through anti-colonial resistance; they, however, do not have a superior *inu* to modify customs, so that the earth is considered as "cool" and awaiting stimulation by a superior *inu* from one of the original lineages. People expect reforms now from outside agents who brought change in the first place, but local authority and autonomy are not much compromised where the equilibrium between common and private land is not threatened (*e.g.* by massive immigration or insecure legislation).

18 That this is beneficial is shown by the eviction of Burkinabe migrants from Côte-d'Ivoire (1998-2000), who believed they had acquired private ownership of lands received by their Ivorian "landlords" for labour services, but had to return to Burkina to search and find land in their home communities. Though deeming the evictions unjust and even though the crisis was provoked by politicians' propaganda against "Burkinabe" domination in order to prevent Alassane Ouattara from running for the presidency, and manipulated courts not to be an Ivoirian citizen (though he was born in Kong, part of Ivory Coast since

1909 —many were reminded of the inalienable reserves tied to ethnic identity in their own homeland.

19 Knowing the history of the enclosure of the "commons", traditional grazing reserves, in Europe, by force by the feudal lords, leaves this reviewer rather pessimistic, however, if the "common" of Africa could long resist the pressures of state and politicians for expropriation. Also Jacob advocates extreme attention to guarantees for the locals in so-called land reforms.

NOTES

1. Whereas in his earlier work Jacob dealt with *"chefs de terre",* which I will translate as "earth priests", and chiefs coming from outside, he concentrates in the present work only on the earth priests in connection with control of the land, before other ethnic groups such as the Mossi moved in and established their *"chefferies".*